

Newsletter

February 2025

The major battles that took place during the months of February 1900, 1901 and 1902 in the South African War (1899-1902) have been covered in previous newsletters. This newsletter will record other interesting aspects of the war, together with other notable 'February' events.

February 1900: The regiment, City of London Imperial Volunteers, landed in Cape Town at the beginning of the month. Wikipedia records – *"After the outbreak of the Second Boer War in October 1899, volunteer corps were established in most counties of the United Kingdom to provide officers and men for service in South Africa. In December a proposal was put forward that the City of London should sponsor a volunteer troop of soldiers to take part in the conflict. The Lord Mayor, Alfred James Newton was approached by Colonel Boxall on the subject and within days he had reached agreement with various City livery companies, bankers, merchants and the Court of Common Council to support and fund the venture. A corps of Imperial volunteers to be raised and equipped by the City of London was authorized by Royal Warrant dated 24 December 1899 with the name City of London Imperial Volunteers - CIV for short."*

The book 'One Thousand Miles with the C.I.V.' by J. Barclay Lloyd records (page 33) – *"We who landed from the Ariosto have had but a short spell of camp life before entraining for the front. Our arrival seemed to mark a crisis in the war. The news we received on board, on the night of our reaching port, was disheartening. Buller's column after its retreat was stationary at Chieverley, no information was to hand from Methuen or Gatacre, while there were reports of minor reverses around Colesberg and Arundel. But the next morning as we marched into Green Point Camp, the other portion of the battalion, who had arrived many days before us, returned from their morning exercise, and the camp rang with cheers as the official news was proclaimed of the Relief of Kimberley, the stirring march of French through the Free State, and the general advance and invasion of the enemy's country by Lord Roberts."*



The date of the above record in the book was 23 February 1900, and although Kimberley had been relieved, French was not marching triumphantly through the Free State, and Roberts was certainly not 'invading' the Free State or Transvaal – the two 'Republics' who were at war with Great Britain.

Lord Roberts had also just issued his first proclamation to the Free State Boers warning them against future hostilities towards the invading force.

Picture: Lord Roberts

February 1901: British columns under Colonel Plumer, General Knox and General Bruce Hamilton were chasing de Wet and his band of Boer commandos in the Northern Cape and Southern Free State but were making little progress due to weather conditions and the availability of supplies. At this stage of the war, the Boers were 'travelling light' and had little trouble in staying ahead of the British columns who travelled with large, cumbersome, support structures.

The British troops in the Southern Transvaal were not having things any easier. The Times History of the War records (vol. V, page 176) – *"Meanwhile the troops had been severely tried. On February 20 the four southern columns ran out of all supplies and had to live on the country for more than a fortnight. The northern columns by doling out small rations, managed to eke out their provisions till the 26th, and after that date the whole force was in the same plight. Though there was plenty of fresh meat, mealies were scarce, and it was only by bribing the 'locals' to dig up their hidden stores, that a scanty ration of mielie flour could be distributed to the men. The long and dismal period of saturation and semi-starvation was borne by French's troops with a cheerful fortitude which deserves the warmest admiration."*

On 28 February 1901 the British Commander Lord Kitchener met Boer Commander Louis Botha at Middelburg to discuss terms of a possible peace agreement. The talks, which lasted for about five hours, ultimately came to nothing, resulting in Kitchener changing his military tactics and laying plans for setting up barbed wire and block houses all over the Boer Republic, to combat the Boer fighters' guerrilla tactics.



Picture: The participants at the peace talks

February 1902: It took almost a year for the 'barbed wire and block house system', mentioned earlier, to become a serious initiative. The book 'Goodbye Dolly Gray' by Rayne Kruger records (page 471) – *"... at nightfall on 5 February, Kitchener had 9 000 men drawn up in a continuous cordon, fifty-four miles long, between the northern and southern blockhouse lines (i.e. Frankfort to a point west of Bethlehem) – one man per twelve yards. Starting on the morrow it was to move westwards at the rate of twenty miles per day, with an unbroken screen of scouts preceding by a mile, the main body, transport, and guns, until it reached the Central railway in two days and three nights. The orders issued by Rimmington, who commanded one of the units in the driving force, and was the originator of the new system, typify the meticulous arrangements for keeping the cordon continuous by night."*

There were seven components to the order, the first being *"Every man, from Brigadier to the last native, to be on duty and to act as sentry for one-third of the night."* The other six were – Front

Line, Rear Line, Sham Front Line, Cover and Obstacles, Lights, and Subterfuges. Details of all of these can be found in Rayne Kruger's book.

Other interesting events during the month of February:

- **27 February 1881** – Battle of Majuba
- **2 February 1901** – Queen Victoria's Funeral
- **12 February 1901** – Boer 'peace envoy' executed in Belfast, Eastern Transvaal
- **27 February 1902** – Breaker Morant and Peter Handcock executed in Pretoria
- **24 February (every year)** – Purple Poppy Day – Animal Remembrance Day.



Although my main interest is the South African War (1899-1902), being a medal collector, my interest covers other conflicts. I have a book 'The Thin Yellow Line' by William Moore, and an event that happened on **21 February 1916**, reminded me of the book, and the following story.

The book covers – *"The summary executions by firing squad of confused and shell-shocked British soldiers in the First World War still arouses heated passions over eighty years later. Calls for posthumous pardons are still made in Parliament on behalf of these men who were tried by flawed court martial and shot within hours of the verdict."*

Picture: Private William Hunter's grave

I have the following story about an execution that took place on 21 February 1916 but can't recall the source – so give credit to the source whatever it might be – the title of the article is 'Remembering the Fallen'.

"On this day in 1916, Private William Hunter, 1st Battalion the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, was shot at dawn for desertion, and later pardoned in 2006.

One of a family of four children, he left home at the age of fourteen, and spent two years as a sailor, after which time he joined the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, giving his age as two years older. He arrived on the western front in January 1915, and by his own account 'kept a clean sheet' for seven months until he met up with others from his hometown.

Private Hunter was absent without leave three times, captured and held court martial, and each time escaped custody out of fear of what might happen to him. He was seventeen years old at the time and stated that he did not realise the seriousness of what he had done, admitting being easily led. He asked for leniency and stated that he was not afraid of the trenches and hoped to 'make a good soldier'. Part of his statement reads – 'I came out to the front on 4th

January 1915. I was in action in January 1915 firstly as a bayonet man in the trenches. I did my tours of duty in the trenches from January to August 1915. On 9th May 1915 I was in the Richebourg engagement. I did my duty properly on these occasions.'

Lieutenant Henry Wilson, Commander of the 4th Corps stated – 'I think this man ought to be shot except that he is very young. He was only 17 years 9 months old last September and therefore recommend that the sentence be commuted to 5 years Penal Servitude not to be suspended.' Private Hunter was sentenced to death, even though the court recommended mercy 'on the grounds of extreme youth, service in the field and likelihood of being a good fighting man' – it does not seem to have been noted that he was at the time too young to even have been sent to the front. He was executed at 6:58 on the morning of 21st February 1916, not even two months after his eighteenth birthday, at Les Bubis in France. He lies buried in the Maroc British Cemetery at Grenay in France, and on his headstone are the words – 'To live in hearts we love is not to die.'"

Private William Hunter was born in Percy Main, a village now part of North Shields, Tyne and Wear.

I wonder whether he 'received' his medals (now that he has been pardoned) – and hopefully the family have them, as treasured items.

But ... back to the Boer War.

During the three February months of the South African War (1900, 1901 & 1902), ten V.C.s were awarded:

1900

Lt. J.P. Milbanke	10 th Hussars	Colesburg (Cape)
Lt. F.N. Parsons	Essex Regiment	Paardeberg
Sgt. A. Atkinson	Yorkshire Regiment	Paardeberg
Pvt. A.E. Curtis	East Surrey Regiment Natal	
Lt. E.T. Inkson	Royal Army Medical Corp	Natal
Sgt. J. Firth	Duke of Wellington's	Plewman's Farm (C.C.)
Cpt. C. Mansel-Jones	West Yorkshire Regt.	Terrace Hill (Natal)

1901

Sgt. W.B. Traynor	West Yorkshire Regt.	Lake Chrissie (Tvl)
Cpl. J.J. Clements	Rimmington's Guides	Strijdenberg (C.C.)

1902

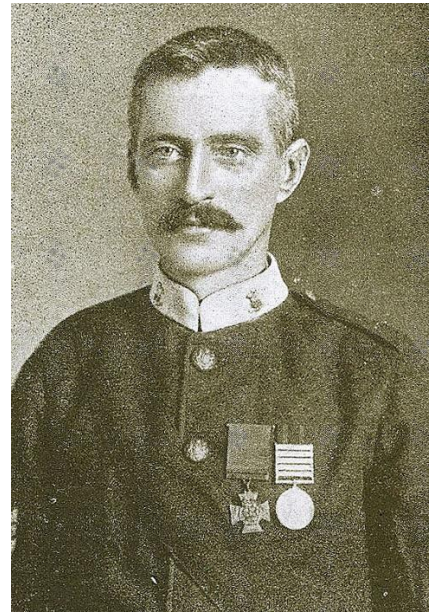
Sur-Capt. A. Martin-Leake	S.A. Constabulary	Vlakfontein (Standerton)
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Victoria Cross of the Month

Sergeant W.B. Traynor, West Yorkshire Regiment

Sergeant Traynor was born at Hull, Yorkshire, on 31 December 1870, and educated in a Roman Catholic school. Traynor joined the 2nd Battalion, West Yorkshire Regiment in November 1888 and served in India. He married Jane Martin in June 1897 and they had four sons and two daughters. One of his daughters died shortly after the Battle of Colenso.

In South Africa Traynor fought in the major Natal battles (Colenso, Spioenkop, Vaalkrantz and Pieter's Hill), then Northern Natal, Orange River Colony and Transvaal. He proved his mettle when Major-General Smith-Dorrien was attacked at Bothwell Camp, Lake Chrissie, 20 miles north-east of Ermelo. The Boers, led by General Louis Botha, attacked in the dark before dawn and got through two picquets, having followed up 200 stampeding cavalry horses. There was murderous fire from both sides.



Picture: Sergeant Traynor V.C.

Citation:

During the night attack on Bothwell Camp, on 6th February 1901, Sergeant Traynor jumped out of a trench and ran out under an extremely heavy fire to the assistance of a wounded man. While running out he was severely wounded and on being unable to carry the man by himself, he called for assistance. Lance-Corporal Lintott at once came to him, and between them they carried the wounded soldier into a shelter. After this, although severely wounded, Sergeant Traynor remained in command of his section and was most cheerful in encouraging his men until the attack failed.

(London Gazette 17 September 1901)

Corporal Lintott was awarded the DCM (Distinguished Conduct Medal) for assisting Sergeant Traynor. The War Office sent a telegram to Mrs. Traynor announcing with regret that he had been killed in action. Traynor's wounds were so serious that he was invalided to England and discharged as medically unfit in September 1901. As he was unable to travel to London to receive his decoration from the King, Traynor was presented with his V.C. at York by Colonel Edward Stevenson Browns V.C. (Zulu War fame).

The following year he was employed as Barrack Warden at Dover, Kent and during the First World War was mentioned for valuable services. He died in Dover on 20 October 1956, aged 83 years and is buried in the Charlton Cemetery. He had twin sons, both of whom served as Majors in the Royal Engineers.

Anniversary of the death of Lieutenant H.L. Dickinson – 24 February 1902

Lieutenant Harold Lissaman Dickinson, 7th New Zealand Mounted Infantry, was killed in action at Langerwacht near Klip River, on 24 February 1902. He was born in Manchester, England, in October 1875. Having been taken to New Zealand when only three years old, he was educated there at Christ Church College, where he served in the College Volunteer Corps. He was an excellent shot and a good horseman.

Lieutenant Dickinson accompanied the 1st New Zealand Contingent to South Africa as a trooper and served under Lieutenant-General French. He was present at the action of Slingsfontein on 15 January 1900, where the New Zealanders behaved with such gallantry, Captain Madocks the officer in command killing the Boer leader. The charge, with fixed bayonets ordered by Captain Madocks, in which Lieutenant Dickinson took part, swept the hills, and is mentioned in the despatch of Lieutenant-General French, dated 22 February 1900.



Lieutenant Dickenson was also present at the Relief of Kimberley, the Battles of Paardeberg, Driefontein and Sanna's Post, the advance on Pretoria and the action at Diamond Hill. In February 1901, he returned to New Zealand, but being given a commission as Lieutenant, he was back again in South Africa in April and saw much fighting.

Picture: 1st New Zealand Contingent

In the action in which he was killed, the 7th New Zealand Mounted Infantry to which he belonged made a most gallant resistance to an overwhelming attack by the Boers under Manie Botha. Seven of the eight officers were struck down, and of the men, 20 were killed and 40 wounded. It is stated that only ten men came out of the fight untouched. Lieutenant Dickenson's voice was heard above the noise and firing, rallying and cheering his men until he fell, shot through the head.

(Acknowledgement – The Boer War Casualty Roll by Alexander M Palmer)

REMEMBER to keep an eye on our website (www.battletoursza.com) for regular articles, updates, etc.

Allan Gordon